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THE AMERICAN JOURNAL OF PSYCHOLOGY

VOL. II

FEBRUARY, 1889

No. 2

EXTRACTS FROM THE AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF A PARANOLIAC.¹

Edited, with a Commentary, by
FREDERICK PETERSON, M.D.

As a preface to the autobiographical sketch of this interesting religious paranoiac, I make a few transcripts from the medical records of the Hudson River State Hospital for the Insane, of which institution he was an inmate for over seven years, from July 29, 1872, to October 11, 1879. He was thirty years of age at the time of admission, single, and a farm laborer by occupation. He was not a church member, had a common school education, and was a native of the United States. Hereditary predisposition was not acknowledged. His mother, who accompanied him to the hospital, stated that he had always been delicate in his physical constitution and given to despondency. Since

¹ Read before the Neurological Section of the New York Academy of Medicine, Dec. 14, 1888.

the age of twenty he had done little or nothing, because of ill health. A year previous to his commitment as a lunatic to the hospital, he shot himself in the forehead, in an ineffectual attempt at suicide. Later he developed delusions that the people of the village were acting upon him by magnetism, spoke disparagingly of him, and were conspirators against his peace. During the whole of his sojourn in the hospital he had hallucinations of hearing, and in the earlier period of his stay, delusions of persecution. Toward the end of his seven years of hospital life he gradually developed, in addition, delusions of grandeur. Although he had occasional lapses of self-control, manifested rarely by the breaking of window glass or the tearing of clothing, he was for the greater portion of the time sufficiently self-possessed to restrain whatever violent or destructive inclinations he may have had, and was permitted to go out alone upon the large grounds of the asylum whenever he wished and to wander about the woods at will.

It was during the years 1878 and 1879, the last two of his stay at Poughkeepsie, while still the victim of constant auditory hallucinations and of mingled delusions of persecution, unseen agency and grandeur, that he wrote an autobiographic volume of four hundred manuscript pages, with the extraordinary title-page presented below :¹

¹ It was first written in phonetic cipher, on pieces of brown wrapping paper, but subsequently copied in a neat hand on note paper and bound by himself in a 400-page volume. A New York publisher once had the volume in press, but the forms were destroyed and the publication suppressed by relatives of the patient.

THE
PILING OF TOPHET
AND THE
TRESPASS-OFFERING :

A
TRUE LIFE HISTORY.

BY
F. T. J——,
Patient in the
Hudson River State Hospital for the Insane,
Poughkeepsie, N. Y.

“For Tophet is ordained of old ; yea, for the king it is prepared : he hath made it deep and large ; the pile thereof is fire and much wood ; the breath of the Lord, like a stream of brimstone, doth kindle it.”—Isaiah xxx. 33.

The following is the dedicatory page :

To
Sinners,
who in every sin against their neighbor, by word or manner or responsive feeling, have, from the foundation of the world, been laying their own share of fuel on this unlighted pile ;

and to
Saints,
whose acts towards their God and towards the world have been but an instinctive prelude to this supreme sacrifice,

in the name of
Nature
and its unfailing laws,
and of its
Founder
and His Eternal Kingdom,
this book
is
worshipfully
dedicated.

The book itself is a deeper history of his life and mental evolution than any but himself could furnish. It is remarkable for its excellent literary style, and for its keen reasoning and psychological analysis of his own disordered mind. In it he dissects his hallucinations and delusions like a skilled anatomist. It is as fascinating as a novel. I regret that I can give but extracts here and there which have an especial bearing upon the elucidation of his psychosis.

In the Preface he defines the scope of the book as follows :

“This work is given to the public as a lunatic’s defense of his position. Every effort I have made hitherto to come to an understanding with my fellow-men, on things which I see to proceed from them, and which give my life its whole shape, has drawn out nothing more than blank denials of all knowledge of the things I spoke of. Now it is impossible for me to reduce my thought to the bounds which others have been willing to concede. The object of this little autobiography is to show the form and consistency of the thought that is in my mind.

“I present my evidence to the tribunals of last resort, the public and the press, and ask them to try the case and render their verdict. Have I a right to my thought or have I not? If not, where am I deceived? If I have, why is not mine the *true* thought for all men?”

A paragraph from the Introduction further reveals the object of his confessions :

“A person is supposed to have a reason for what he does, and I might consider it incumbent upon me to tell the motives which actuate me in thus entering upon the work of the scribe under circumstances so peculiar. Is there anything I have to tell that might not as well and more safely be left untold? It is a question which I do not have to consider and decide to-day, for I have been long inspired with the conviction, the consciousness, that I *have* something to tell that it would be worth the world’s while to hear.”

In another introductory paragraph he makes an excellent diagnosis of his mental infirmity. Addressing his reader he says :

“I did not tell you that I am a patient in an asylum. I am to take it for granted at the outset, that my prospective reader knows nothing of my character, condition, or circumstances, beyond what I tell him. I am here as an insane patient. I have been here over five years. . . . Being an insane man, it will be nothing unexpected that I should, in giving these reports of my fortunes, narrate incidents and particulars partaking more or less of the marvelous or preternatural. I am not only a lunatic, but one of the class of lunatics having a controversy with the world in general ; in other words, possessed with a monomania, or crazy one-sidedly, or on a single subject.”

In the hospital record presented above, nothing is adduced as to heredity in his case, and but little stated concerning his mental condition in early youth. These deficiencies are, to a great extent, supplied in the autobiography. I shall permit our author first to describe his appearance in this world, in a cyanotic condition, and the characteristics of his childhood and early youth, and subsequently the hereditary influence in his destiny :

“It is said that I was entirely black when I was ushered into the world, and that for I forget how long a period of time I did nothing but give vent to heart-saddening wails. Was I lamenting the gift of light, on this morning of what was to become a woe-burdened existence ?

“I was a weakly infant. I came near dying of the whooping cough, and it was always asserted by those who knew, that I owed my life to the untiring exertions of a poor woman who lived a neighbor, who busied herself all night with me, dipping me at intervals into a tub of warm water. My half-sister had it at the same time and died.

“It will be of use to give an idea of my nature and disposition in my tender years. I was always a shy, retiring child, not disposed to make myself free with strangers, not much given to prattle—in fact, one of the sad and silent sort from the first. I can remember some peculiar sensations which used to weigh on my mind, which go to show that the foundation of my mind-life was but imperfect from the first. I used to be troubled with very strange feelings when I was waking out of sleep, especially if I had been taking a nap in the daytime. It used to seem to me that I was floating in the air, and I often thought to myself: ‘Why, how queer I have been feeling!’ It was as if I filled the whole room, way up to the ceiling. I was told by others that I sometimes raised myself up in bed after getting to sleep and made an outcry, ‘O don’t, O don’t!’ seeming to be in great distress; but the strange part of it is that I could remember nothing about it. I do not think that I ever remembered even their waking me, or finding them at my bedside. I only had their word for it next day.

“As far as I can go back, I remember having at times, but not frequently, impressions which must be identical with what I have lately heard others speak of as ‘double memory.’ The feeling would all at once creep over me that the very thing I was present with, my ideas and perceptions at that time, had happened to me once before in just the same sequence and arrangement. I have heard this explained as due to a lack of simultaneity in the action of the two lobes of the brain, the tardy one remembering what had already passed through the other. My own theory was different, leaving the organ acting out of consideration. I only went so far as to look at it as a mistaken quality in the perception—an erroneous attaching of the nature of the act of remembering to what was really the act of thinking in the present.

“I was very early in life an observer of my own mental peculiarities, to a degree which I think must be a very rare exception. I often used to be sensible of an unsatisfactoriness in my consciousness of what surrounded me. I used to ask myself, ‘Why is it that while I see and hear and feel everything perfectly, it nevertheless does not seem real to me?’ It is as if I

were in danger of forgetting myself and the place where I am!" I often wondered even how I kept the run of things as well as I did. I always found myself holding on to the orderly and proper connection of my acts, and yet from my feelings I could not have answered for my doing so. I can remember sitting at my desk in school, when a small boy, and dwelling with melancholy on this dimness in my perception of existence, and wondering how it was with others in this respect. I wondered to myself if life, as ordinarily bestowed, included this deficiency.

"I showed in my tastes and behavior a harmony with the internal composition of my mind. I was never given to the active sports which the common run of boys take so much delight in.

"The simple fact is that I had a languid nervous development, and from the necessity of my organization could not have much capacity or relish for sports of agility.

"If I could compound a boy of my own I should try to improve on the model I remember to have exhibited in myself.

"It is not true that I was regarded or treated as strange or deficient in my wits. Such an idea would look misplaced to those who knew me and consorted with me in those days. These differences are perhaps more evident to myself than they ever were to the greater part of my acquaintances. I brooded on this side of my character at a later period, and I no doubt remain liable to give greater prominence to disparaging traits than some impartial observers would justify me in doing.

"As a general rule, my harmless and peaceable disposition kept me out of squabbles with my schoolmates. If I was approached in an aggressive way I met it with absolute non-resistance, which in my case had the disarming effect which is attributed to it by pious moralists."

"If we change the scene from the playground to the schoolroom we shall find that I attained a distinction of my own apart from the average, and more to my advantage there. I was always a favorite with my teachers. I never gave them any trouble, and took to my studies with a willing relish that could not but be

pleasing to them. I learned to read before I went to school; in fact, like an old asylum acquaintance, Mr. M., inventor and infidel monomaniac, I can almost say that I can't remember when I could not read.

"I was frequently singled out for complimentary remarks on my proficiency in my studies. I gave evidence of some talents of a higher kind—could draw, for instance, better than any boy in the school.

"One of the most marked weaknesses of my character, as a child, was my susceptibility to being teased.

"After having pondered some on the traits of the human animal in this particular, I have come to the conclusion that there is no further explanation needed than that the impression made on the teaser by the teasable is such as to naturally prompt the acts constituting the teasing, as the sense of burning makes us shrink, and an aroma suggestive of a fine flavor tempts us to bite. I feel convinced that the liability to be teased rests on a principle that has a mighty influence in the motions of the soul of humanity.

"My misdeeds, as a child, were rarely prompted by a love of mischief or the result of headlong thoughtlessness.

"I had a well-defined idea of the nature of sin, and I used frequently at night to recall the events of the day and reflect on instances in which I had transgressed and given way to ill-humor, and form resolutions to try and do better. From some of the most flagrant of the sins and improprieties to which small and larger boys are prone, I was entirely free."

Our patient, as has already been stated, was not a church member, and in his book he describes his early religious life and his subsequent beliefs as they developed. His father was a Universalist and his mother a non-professor of religion, although she did attend the Methodist Church. During his boyhood he attended Sunday School regularly, and at one time the Episcopal Church. But his attendance upon divine service ceased in early youth. Both parents were honest, conscientious, and highly respected in the

community. They were first cousins. The mother was healthy in mind and body, but the father is reported to have been exceedingly eccentric, possibly insane. From what I have recently learned regarding him, he also was something of a paranoiac. They strove to bring up their children carefully and educate them as well as possible. Concerning their inculcations in his youth, he says :

“My early training cannot be said to have been a predominantly religious one. My mind was neither imbued with ineradicable prejudices, nor prepared for reaction to the other extreme by excessively rigid sectarian drilling and formalism.”

His father died when he was twelve years of age. Up to the age of thirteen he attended a country school, both winter and summer, but after that his farm-work permitted him only winter schooling. Still, he evidently had unusual talents and aptitudes, and we find him later studying by himself, in the original, many of the classic Latin authors ; and among his favorite companions were the works of Boethius, Lucretius, and Josephus and the Bible. His literary style and modes of thought are in themselves an evidence of more than ordinary attainments in rhetoric, philosophy, and logic. I regret that I cannot present this book in full, because every page has its value as an index of the condition of his mind from childhood to the last years of his confinement in the asylum, and the story is told with a directness and simplicity that marks truth upon every statement and lends it such charm as pertains to all works which portray life with the utmost fidelity. In its way it has as much value as Amiel's *Journal Intime*, and its psychological analysis ranks higher, in my estimation, than some of the artificial work of Dostojewsky (Raskolnikoff).

The matter of heredity in his case was not sifted thoroughly upon his admission to the hospital, nor have I since been able to gather much material relative to this factor in his evolution. But one important element of this nature is described in his book—an element not only hereditary in its character, but for a long time part of his environment, and undoubtedly an influence modifying his mental condition both before and after his birth. I allude to a great-uncle, a brother of his grandmother on his mother's side, who was himself a paranoiac, and who lived upon the farm in intimate companionship with our patient until the latter was twenty-three years old. I cannot do better than permit the author to describe this peculiar personage and their life together, in his own words :

“I worked steadily upon the farm, though with moderation, at such kinds of work as I seemed to be equal to. The heavier kinds of work, such as plowing and wagoning, as also the marketing of the produce, were attended to by my great-uncle.

“It is a somewhat delicate subject to manage to my satisfaction, this that I am about to enter upon, but it demands candid and impartial treatment, because the events that followed in later years cannot be rightly understood without it. It is impossible for me to give a veracious sketch of my soul-life during this period without dwelling quite minutely on the characteristics of my great-uncle. He was a man who had roughed it a good deal in the world, had been at one time in his life a live-oaker in Florida. How his temper and disposition may have been at an earlier period I cannot say—I only remember him as a man possessed of the belief that a certain young man living on an adjoining farm had the power to torture him at his pleasure, both by bothering his brains and inflicting physical pain ; which power he made use of to such good effect that the poor victim was almost constantly kept busy holding him at bay by means of cursings of the most fierce and vigorous description.

While at work with the horses in the fields, and when driving, he would intermix his commands to the animals with savage execrations of the troubler of his peace. The unfortunate man was troubled, at certain seasons of the year especially, with sore feet, and at such times his imprecations against the offender would fairly rise to yells, and were almost blood-curdling in their intense ferocity. Thus it went on day and night. He slept in a small room in one of the outbuildings, and often he could be heard a great distance off shouting out threats, sometimes throwing boots or boot-jacks against the boarded side of the building where he lodged, to put in the interjection points.

"It may be imagined that a boy of a reserved and sensitive disposition, as I was, could not assimilate very well with such a character as this. I was always distant in my intercourse with him, and a feeling of aversion for his habits of savagery led me to avoid coming in contact with him more than was rendered necessary by our joint labors on the farm.

"As the years passed on and I continued to live in the presence of my uncle's fierce demonstrations of hostility against the invisible destroyer of his comfort, my tolerance for his conduct insensibly gave way. I had now reached the age of eighteen or nineteen, was a tall slender youth, not strong either in nerve or muscle.

"The exhibitions of his ruling passion called up more and more determined feelings of antagonism in my breast.

"Before I knew it I had gone a criminal length in my resentful feeling. I came at last to feel that a person of such a thoroughly savage character did not deserve more indulgence than a mad dog. My position from that time was one of contingent murder. Alas! that I should have been content to let such a state of things last a single day. The frightful danger of my situation ought to have been sufficient to spur me to sacrifice everything to escape from it. But I was in chains, the chains of apathy, impotence and incapacity, and I could only stay where I was and fume against the object of my detestation.

"I must always regard it as one of the most unfortunate things in my unfortunate career that I should

have been placed in contact with this much to be commiserated sufferer at such a time of life. It was not the man himself that I hated. When my judgment could act without impediment, I saw that his unpleasant behavior was entirely the phenomena presented by his never-ending war against what was in his eyes the most wicked and cruel of persecutions. I could then pity him and dismiss all rancorous thoughts."

This antipathy led to a change in the residence of our author. He felt that he must be separated from his uncle, and accordingly he removed to a town at some distance from the farm. It is curious that he never speaks of his uncle as insane, and it is probable that both his mother and himself and other relatives regarded his persecutory delusions as merely evidence of eccentricity. Soon after removing to town he had some pulmonary difficulty, and he speaks at some length of this as follows :

"In the depressed state of my nerves I imagined myself much worse than I really was, and like many others in the same condition, I felt as if I was liable to sink away and die at any time. My disease was accompanied with periodical accesses of fever, and in the fictitious strength of excitement given by this, my mind seemed to gain an abnormal activity. It was at this time that I first received a revelation on the mysteries of the human soul that had an all-dominant effect on my destinies and the turn of my thoughts ever after. . . . I now learned what had always been to me a hidden mystery—what was the meaning of strength of will and strength of intellect. Before I had ever lived enshrouded in mists and clouds. In that transitory strength given by the fever coursing through my veins, I now saw the man I ought to have become rising up like a shadowy phantom in judgment on the wreck which I really was. . . . My agitation was so great that my mother and the neighbors seemed to fear I was going crazy. I felt that I *had* been crazy for a long while and had just recovered reason. It was a fact. But I was constrained to lock up my remorseful agony in my own breast."

We have seen that our patient was throughout his early youth morbidly subjective, and his hypochondriasis increased with years. He had now attained the age of twenty-three; we shall let him describe his mental condition and habits of life at this time. In this description we shall see the gradual growth of persecutory ideas upon a favorable soil:

“My strength and endurance were not sufficient for manual labor, and I did not feel confidence enough in the clearness and energy of my mind to justify me in making application for any post where head-work would have been demanded, or for which ready presence of mind, or a good address, would have been required. But it was the unpleasantness felt on contact with my fellow-men that operated more strongly than anything else in binding me down to the course of life to which I devoted myself. I felt my deficiencies most keenly every time I met a human being face to face. . . . I could not do otherwise than shun what was so galling to my sensibility, while appearing to conduce to no desirable end. . . . But I am going to show that I still remained exposed to very great dangers, and it is as true as it was before that I shunned the only means of averting the calamities threatening me, no doubt of necessity at this stage, and in obedience to the eternal decree that every tree shall spread out and develop in accordance with the qualities given to it ‘before it was in the ground.’ I did not like the constraint imposed upon me by the presence of man. I did like the freedom of solitude. I strongly disliked many things I noticed in the manner and words of some I met, and there was nothing to prevent this dislike from occasionally being absorbed into my solitary musings, to find its final resolution in the passion of indignation in its various degrees of intensity as the case might be. I have spoken before of my defective means of defense against ‘teasing’ or mocking for the purpose of troubling. I was always terribly alert and sensitive to all kinds of ‘snubs’ and sneers, and oblique remarks in general, on their proficiency in which some people pride themselves so much. . . . I was also disagreeably impressed by the ways of some

who showed a disposition to turn their attention to myself, instead of confining themselves to the subject I was presenting to them.

"I was being carried into a state of secret enmity to mankind in general by the prevailing tenor of my brooding meditations, and there was no corrective present.

"But all received a hue from a yearning for what was worthy in life, paired with a mournful sense of its hopeless absence. Whatever wrong turns I may in my weakness have been betrayed into, it is impossible that I should look upon my then existing frame of mind as a whole with repentant feelings. As well condemn righteousness and holiness itself!

"When I admit that I occasionally was overcome with an irruption of hard feelings toward wrong-doing man, it will of course not be understood that I was habitually morose and spiteful in temper. Nothing could be further from the truth. What commotion there was, was mostly internal, rarely reaching the surface in visible ebullitions. . . . I occupied myself with the trifling labors of my garden, dwelling with interest and pleasure on the progress of my crops and flowers, and every now and then took a ramble over to the woods lying to the south, which were a favorite place of resort to me all the while I lived there. There I botanized and moralized, explored the recesses of the woods, enjoyed the calm quiet of nature, and groaned over my hapless condition, wondering what it was to come to.

"There were some little things that happened to me the first year after I left the farm which became as it were a kind of sample of what I must continue to expect, and the memory of which had more influence over my action in aftertime than I was aware of myself, no doubt. . . . When I was around the city, thinking I might get employment I called on one of my old acquaintances, who was then in a store. I talked with him a few minutes at that time. I called again a short time after, when I was told by the proprietor that the gentleman I had called to see was not in. There were a number of men present in the store, salesmen, and it became apparent to me that they were trying to exhibit an offensive demeanor toward

me, or perhaps it would be as true to say that they were moved to make a derisive demonstration against me. At all events, all, with perhaps the exception of the proprietor, stood with contortions of countenance, which was perhaps laughter, until I retired. . . . I found it hard to consign this to forgetfulness. At first it lay dormant, but it would come up, and I must confess I had hard feelings, even revengeful feelings, toward the actors. Another thing happened the same fall. I went to a store and standing at the counter was noticed by one of the clerks, an Irishman, who came to me and said, 'I always wait on the little boys first,' and as I took no notice of the remark, seemed so determined his words should not be lost on me that he repeated them with the addition, '*like you.*' As before it produced no immediate effect, but it afterwards rose and rankled in my memory, and I was not able to keep clear of imagining vindictive things. In fact, to tell the truth, in both cases I felt that blood would have been sweet to me. . . . My mode of thinking on these incidents no doubt had in it much of the character of insanity. . . . The effect was that I got settled down into the fixed idea that contact with the thoughtless evil world, in my state of body and mind, would impose upon me the necessity of committing crime in vindication of my honor. . . . I let these bloody memories tinge my whole mind and all its anticipations and resolutions for the future. . . . 'I see,' I said to myself in substance, 'that these galling collisions are the natural penalties of being imperfect.'

"It may be as well, for the prevention of misconceptions, to say that I never took one step toward putting any design thence arising into execution. I had no designs. I never armed myself, or, in fact, went any further than to rehearse the drama of revenge in my own mind. The pistol I bought was one which I would not have trusted for a moment to carry for the purpose of self-defense. . . . Nevertheless, the events on the farm show that my wickedness was not altogether of a mimic kind, and I will not attempt to escape righteous judgment.

"I used to make many resolutions about regularity in habits of eating which I found myself powerless to keep. A sense of depression and vacuity would come

over me, aggravated by my solitary, monotonous life, I presume, and often by an obstructed state of the alimentary organs. . . . It is a common feature in insanity or semi-insanity left to itself, I think. I also exerted my brain to the extent of abuse, I know, in the way of study. . . . I used to study Latin for a pastime, and often kept cudgeling my brains over Cicero and Cæsar until the top of my head was very sore. This solitary immersing of an enfeebled mind in study, with obliviousness to myself and all surroundings, was, no doubt, a help toward the grand consummation that took place in the fulness of things. . . . I suffered a good deal from bodily ailments. My liver seemed to be thoroughly out of order and torpid. I had a feeling of hardness and inflammation in my sides regularly, a certain length of time after meals; digestion was bad, appetite irregular—in fact, every sign of a deadlock in the vital functions.”

We have seen in these excerpts from the author's account of himself how heredity and environment had gradually moulded his physical and mental characters. A shy, timid, delicate child, clever intellectually, given to oddities of speech and conduct, inclined to solitary musing, rarely sharing the sports or games of other boys—in him were slowly evolving marked eccentricity of demeanor, a disposition to shun his fellows, a misinterpretation of their looks and actions as regarded himself, a morbid egotism, a consciousness of a gulf between himself and ordinary men, with deep depression, outbursts of passion, an inclination to homicide restrained but feebly by his weakened will, and delusions of persecution. No doubt the derogatory remarks he fancied expressed about him in the stores were the first harbingers of auditory hallucinations. Of late he had murder in his thoughts, through the morbid humiliation he felt at the imaginary insults from others. No doubt, as his conduct grew more and more strange, he did attract attention among his

fellow-men, and this, unfortunately, would but feed the flame of his pathological self-consciousness.

His mother and himself removed to another village in 1871, when he was 28 years of age, by which time there was but little question of his insanity, even among his relatives. I let him take the thread of the story again at this epoch :

“When my mother was making preparations for moving she asked me to help in packing up some chairs. I made an effort to apply myself to the task, but suddenly found myself overcome by my feelings, and before I knew what I was about I had shivered one of the chairs to fragments. A most unpromising omen ! The fact is that I was and had been for some time in a state which any physician, knowing the facts, would have pronounced to be unmistakable insanity. But I had different ideas about what constituted insanity, and often thought to myself that if I did get put into an asylum, as had been threatened, they would not keep me, because they would see I was perfectly rational. I have learned more about the subject since.

“Things of the kind I have told of had happened to me before, at uncertain intervals, during several years, an obstructed state of the bowels bringing on a turn. I would get into such a condition of exaggerated discomfort as to lose for a moment, or sometimes quite a spell, my control over my actions and act very strangely. Sometimes I dashed down an article I happened to have in my hands, or demolished the first thing that came to hand ; sometimes I gave vent to my feelings by grating my teeth, ‘clawing’ my face, and going through strange grimaces and agonizing contortions. My face seemed to me to be paralyzed when I had such turns, as if lifeless. The worst thing I ever did was when I flew at my mother in a sudden access of frenzy one day, when she had wrought upon my feelings by talking to me irritatingly, and bit out a mouthful of her hair. . . . When I was committed to the asylum, at a later day, it was reported as one of my symptoms that I had delusions about my mother

being my enemy, etc., but nothing could be further from the truth. . . . I often grieved in secret over my inability to be a stay and protection to her, bereft as she was of all other support, but all in vain.

"In my new home I was in one of a row of houses, with strangers living near on both sides, and the sense of the presence of the evil which I had shrunk from so long weighed down upon me with crushing weight. After awhile my spell of hypochondriacal despondency passed off, and I settled down into the way of living which I adhered to as long as I remained there. As to getting acquainted with my neighbors, or having any intercourse or dealings with them, that was altogether out of the question. . . I now had more of the feeling of constraint, from the knowledge that I was moving under the eyes of people who were stranger to me than the strangest of the strange could be to a person of the ordinary stamp. Sometimes I heard remarks which did not affect my feelings flatteringly, but that was not common.

"Along in June I had a worse spell than common of the kind of nervous stagnation or will-impotence of which I have spoken, and perpetrated some quite irregular acts before my fetters became slackened. In my despair I tore the collar from my shirt, tore the slippers I was wearing, dashed my fist into a tempting dish which my mother was offering me to eat, and other things of the kind. The house we occupied was owned by a maiden lady who lived with her sister in part of the house. . . . In the evening after the other sister returned, who had been absent during the day, I overheard a few words which showed plainly enough that the events of the day were being discussed in no very gratified humor. It was evident that my acts were severely reprobated."

The next day the justice of the peace called upon him and admonished him to restrain himself, hinting of the asylum. Of this our author says :

"The dragon's-tooth of reprimand that had been left in my mind grew into a monster, in whose presence I found it impossible to live, and I had a fresh access of despair. It was a hot June morning. I re-

member seizing a razor and flourishing it, and saying, 'Show me that rascal and I will slaughter him,' or words to that effect, meaning, of course, the justice of the peace."

Both homicidal and suicidal inclinations had long been haunting the secret corners of his mind, for three years before he tells of buying a pistol for the express purpose of making way with himself or some one else. On this day, after meeting the officer, he determined upon suicide. He walked out to two different country stores and bought ammunition. On his way back he passed some men in a field. They all looked at him, and one of them "laughed loud and mockingly, and then cried out in a sort of squealing way, the intention of which could not be mistaken." Then he played a game of croquet with a young man at his uncle's, and overheard the young man make a covert and derisive remark. He continues :

"I passed the next day in brooding, silent, melancholy. It was a rainy day and in accord with my feelings. . . . That night I wrote a little statement to be left behind. . . . It cannot be said that I plunged thoughtlessly into the gulf of self-murder. I had from the first gauged the responsibility I was taking on myself, as fully as my mind was capable of doing it. I felt the whole weight of the condemnation that rested upon me for committing such a deed. . . . I passed some part of the hours of the night in sleep. In the morning my mother came to the door to see how I was, and I grasped her hand with a gesture of agonized despair. She took it as an indication that I was going to have one of my wild spells again, and, as she told me afterwards, began to anticipate some work of demolition after I should come down stairs. After she had gone down, I went and took the pistol from the stand-drawer, put on a fresh cap, got into bed again and propped up my head on the pillows, placed the muzzle of the pistol against the center of my forehead, and fired."

He lost considerable blood from the scalp-wound, but the bullet had glanced off ; and, although he now tried to starve himself, he was up and about in a few days as usual, attending to his garden with bandaged forehead. He continues :

“There were some steps taken toward getting me into an asylum after my abortive attempt at suicide, but as there were difficulties about it, and I appeared perfectly sensible and rational, my relatives concluded to let it rest.

“From the time of my shooting until the next spring there was not much that deserves mention. How were my thoughts about suicide ? It must be said that I had not totally renounced that idea. . . . I used very often to scan the beams in the wood-house and the coils of clothes-line in the garret The old difficulty of giving way under the slighting or displeasing demonstrations from others remained as bad as ever. I remember once I was so wrought upon by some trifling thing said or done by one of my relations that I kicked out the bottom of a cane-seat chair I was resting my feet on, in a sudden paroxysm of impotent emotion.”

About this time he also made a futile attempt to poison himself by drinking a bottle of strong tincture of valerian that he had made himself. This incident he describes, and then proceeds :

“It was my intention when I began this sketch of my life to give greatest prominence to that part beginning with my troubles in Clinton Street, that is to say, the period of confirmed lunacy with hallucinations, according to the world’s avowed decision ; but it appears at present that my project is not to go into fulfilment. I have been greatly delayed in doing as much as I have by lack of strength.

“To make the account which I have given as full an exhibition of my condition at the time my hallucinations (if such) appeared, I will note some further defects in my mental action which I had noticed up to

this time. First, two or three things indicating original lack of control over the brain by the will, or non-identification of my will with the action of my brain, and which I must count for predisposition. I have been troubled from my boyhood with a tendency of my brain to see things it ought not to see in what is placed before my eyes. This refractoriness does not extend to all kinds of monstrous visions, but is limited to the singling out of the lineaments of the human face in the outlines of objects seen. The annoyance I have experienced from this has varied greatly, according to the state of my health. When I used to be sick with the fever and ague, I would lie in bed and gaze at the coarsely-daubed window shades in my bedroom, until I had made out every possible kind of a profile that could be distinguished.

"The other of the two most serious abnormal peculiarities is the supplying of missing articulations to vocal sounds, heard but not understood distinctly, so as to give my mind the impression of certain words, at the same time that I knew I had not understood. Sometimes I have been really cheated this way, and only found it out by inquiring afterward. This might not give conclusive proof of the deception, it is true. Not to violate privacies, I will illustrate suppositively. If it were proclaimed aloud, far enough from me to allow the inflections but not the articulations to reach my ear with certainty:

WE SEE WHERE LIES THE DREADFUL SECRET!

My mind might involuntarily and instantaneously reshape it in such a way that I would understand:

DECEIVE WHERE LIES WERE EVER SACRED!

"My attention was always quite easily disturbed by noises, particularly talking. In boyhood the sound of voices in conversation at a little distance after I had retired to rest often gave me very serious annoyance, showing excessive irritability of the brain.

"Such was my mental state on the eve of my being overtaken by a more marvelously awful fate than ever fell to the lot of mortal man.

"My original purpose was to follow the incidents having a bearing on my mental fortunes with tolerable minuteness, in an unbroken chain, up to the time of reaching that wonderful state in which I have existed for the last six and one-half years.

"I shall be obliged to confine myself more to generalities.

"I was in such a towering state of morbid sensitiveness, that a slight tinge of impertinence, brusqueness, or fancied contemptuousness, in the manner of those I met, put me on the rack at once. . . . It began to occur to me after a little that my ears were becoming wonderfully acute for such things. Very often I would hear lively discussions on my character, and disputes about the proper epithets and titles to be applied to me, which I understood perfectly at an astonishing distance off. . . . I was wrought up to such a pitch that I formed a resolve that if I were given a sufficiently open provocation, I would attempt a bloody revenge, and on one occasion went out with a razor in my pocket. . . . I had an oppressive feeling of impotence, as if paralyzed, and suddenly did things I had no intention of doing, as in breaking glass. . . . I had a soreness all through my limbs which I compared to molten fire running through my nerves.

"I began to hear responses to and comments on my performances, and it gradually dawned upon me that I had been making myself a conspicuous object of curiosity to the whole neighborhood. . . . The comments heard grew more numerous and more and more derisive. . . . I had no suspicion at the time of any of the inspiration being drawn directly from my head. I do not say it was so. This is the debatable ground. . . . It was not until about a week later that it became evident to me that I was hearing my own thoughts given expression to by foreign wills and voices."

There is a chapter or two of the volume given to illustrations of his hallucinations at this time, but, full of interest as they are, there is no space for their reproduction here. We have followed the author's history thus far from infancy through childhood and youth to manhood, and have seen how slowly but surely the hereditary seed sown in degenerative soil had taken root and flourished. His peculiar auditory acuteness, with his morbid shyness, soon gave rise to illusions of hearing, and these again were transformed

into hallucinations, as is evident if the thread of the narrative has been carefully followed. The curious foundation of his hallucinations he well illustrates and understands. An idea rises in his own mind of what people would say in discussing him, and immediately consciousness in the auditory area projects the idea in spoken words into the environment. He noted this peculiarity of his own thoughts being repeated to him by the voices about him, yet he could not correct the delusions to which they gave origin, but interpreted the matter with the reason and judgment of an insane mind. He naturally had the delusion founded upon his hallucinations that people were persecuting him, but upon this now grew another delusion. He began to believe that they could read and repeat his thoughts, that there was some magnetic means by which his tormentors could draw off his thoughts, that other wills could act upon his body, dominating his own will and causing him to do things he had no desire or intention of doing. I will allow him to continue in his own language :

“I heard a great deal about ‘inducting,’ ‘conducting,’ ‘sphere of influence,’ sometimes even ‘poles,’ positive and negative, and my brain was constantly compared to a magnet. . . . I could find no better explanation myself for a long time than the theory of a fluid, similar to or the same as electricity, uniting brains.”

Among the extraordinary tales he heard at this time was the following :

“One was the story of an English physician who had become acquainted with my magnetic properties, and who was on the spot at the beginning, directing the experiment. He was stated to have been the first to form a perfect communication with the inducted

brain, and he had drawn off my entire memory back to childhood, and had delivered it verbally in the presence of reporters from the city, who had taken it down. It was stated that the record was preserved in a number of thick volumes. These he had taken with him when he sailed for England during the most prosperous part of the experiment. It was further asserted that he continued in communication with my thoughts, and that wherever he went, every one to whom he told the story of the new marvel was also set in connection with the magnetic current flowing from my head, and began to participate in my thoughts. . . . One word more of the English doctor. He is said to have declared that if he had assisted at my birth he would not have suffered me to remain alive, as the monstrous character of my organization could have been seen at a glance. . . . After the whole earth had become pervaded with the magnetism from my head, it would be felt as long as I lived, and the instant of my death would be thus signaled all over the globe, and would be noted and used by all nations as a new era from which to reckon time."

It was about this time that he was removed to the asylum at Poughkeepsie. Several chapters of his book are devoted to a description of his life there, his religious beliefs, illusions and hallucinations, but from these I can make only a few extracts. A short time previous to his departure for the hospital he began to read much in the Bible, Of this he speaks as follows :

"I would think of the Bible, go and open it at hazard, and just where my eye fell there was a passage that showed me *myself*. Once when I had been fretting about my ill success in getting my mother to accord with my views about my neighbors' doings, I hit upon this :

'And it shall come to pass that when any shall yet prophesy, then his father and his mother that begat him shall say unto him, Thou shalt not live; for thou speakest lies in the name of the Lord; and his father and his mother that begat him shall thrust him through when he prophesieth,' etc.—Zechariah xiii."

There were other similar coincidences, and he looked upon them at first as merely such, but in time the resemblances became so strongly marked to his disordered intelligence, that he came to look upon whole chapters of the Bible as referring to himself. He says :

“But the most perfect identity of all is to be found scattered through the Psalms,” [of which he quotes several pages and then continues], “I do not intend to appropriate the spirit of these passages, or to make their language my own, but quote them thus collectively as an evidence of fact. I am myself but an enquirer. Do they express the experience of any certain person or persons? Or are they prophetic? . . . Can it be that the same thing that has happened to me has befallen another in ages long past, and that these are the traces of it?”

“I have also found a most remarkably close application of many of the precepts and reflections of Thomas à Kempis in his ‘Imitation of Christ.’ He seems to keep the same character exhibited in the Psalms in view, only speaking as a monitor instead of in his person. I presume I find myself mirrored in both these places, because I am an extreme case.”

He also found references to himself in Goldsmith’s “Animated Nature,” his own surname being there frequently used as an ordinary noun, although a word seldom employed in the English of to-day.

Gradually his delusions burgeoning one from another became so systematized that in the last year of his stay at this asylum he could write in his book :

“The signs are too many and too evident to permit me to doubt that my destiny is bound up with the religion of the world. I steadfastly believe that the words in Jeremiah, ‘take forth the precious from the vile,’ are addressed to me; and I cannot be recreant to the holiest of duties. . . . I will not waste time in useless discussion, but start with the assumption that it is God’s will that I should give the world my opinions.

“If it comes to be generally believed that my sign is a fulfilment of Hebrew prophecy, I would recommend a transfer [of the Sabbath] to the day of the commandment. The very fact of a day one step removed being fixed on by both Christians and Mohammedans looks like an admission that another step remained to be taken.

“Was it not the confidence of Jesus in the book spoken of above that made him say he knew the Father, when contending with believers in personified derangement?”

Quite a large part of the volume is devoted to expounding the Scriptures, in accordance with his delusion that he is a prophet come to reveal a new religion.

For instance, of Babel he says :

“I find an application for the tower of Babel in my own insane history. I expect a confusion of the speech of the old sects to ensue likewise.”

Of Abraham he remarks :

“Abraham is accounted the father of all who believe in the Eternal. I believe I am chosen as his sign for the abolition of all dishonoring beliefs, as Abraham was set up against all idolaters and pagans. . . . I have to note in connection with the offering of Isaac by Abraham, that I find the date given as 1872 before Christ, coinciding with the year after Christ in which my ear-troubles commenced.”

Of Esau :

“We may take Esau for polytheistic religion, recognizing and deifying every force and passion that has dominion over the soul or destiny of man. . . . When it gave up its birthright for belief in a single judge, it pledged itself to go on and submit to be judged by the new master. I believe that the day of judgment has come.”

Of the miracle of the rods :

“The rods changed into serpents signify arguments becoming living convictions in the mind of Pharaoh.

The evangelists' rods live as serpents in the minds of Christian believers, but I confidently expect that my rod will become a serpent that will swallow them all without trouble.

"Israel is held responsible for the destruction of the heathen and their idols. I conceive that I am the Lord's instrument for the completion of this work, and that I have been shown these signs in the law that my hands might be strengthened.

"I cannot shut my eyes to the fact that I have been made the world's sin-offering."

Of the prophets :

"The prophets I will take in a lump, with the assurance that no one can fail to see their connection with my destiny. There is a prophecy in Ezekiel, xxxiii. 30, which is very closely paralleled in my experience. . . . Jonah gives me a parable."

His discussions of theological questions are interesting, perfectly coherent and logical, although often fanciful. He pays tribute to the beautiful moral laws and righteousness of Christ, but is disposed to criticize his conduct as being inconsistent in one who claimed to partake of the omnipotence and omniscience of the Eternal. Of resurrection he says :

"If I conceive of a new body having the memory which I have of this body's life (and I can find no other idea of the continuance of a soul's life except in the perpetuation or renewal of the memory), would that in the new body be a *true* memory? Would it not be a hallucination? Would not that be an insane creation?"

We see from all that has thus far been quoted that our author had several incentives for writing this book. It contains the autobiography of a new prophet as well as the revelation of a new religion. From his standpoint as a man in whose destiny are wrapped up the destinies of the world, he tells posterity of the

tortures and trials he has passed through as an atonement for the sins of the earth, how he was mocked at and scoffed at, his brain acted upon by magnetic agency, and himself imprisoned in a lunatic asylum for years. Hence the title of his book: "*The Piling of Tophet and the Trespass-offering.*" But behind this insane egotism there shines at times some faint glimmer of the truth, so that he frequently speaks of himself, in the terms used by his fellows, as insane, a lunatic, a monomaniac, as having hallucinations; and he thinks the opinions of his friends, relatives and physicians, of sufficient worth to merit considerable argument in his book. He knows what insanity is; he recognizes it in his asylum associates. He could at times "see the man he ought to have become rising up like a shadowy phantom in judgment on the wreck which he really was." But this occasional consciousness of their disordered mental condition is by no means infrequent in the insane. In speaking of the years of his greatest mental aberration, he says:

"Here I come to more debatable territory, on which I and the rest of the world have until this present been at variance. I will, in deference to the other side, make use of the word *believe* in stating facts drawn from the region of my memory lying within this shadowy world. I will be permitted to say, therefore, that I *believe* that after settling down in the before-mentioned place, my brain was, by the gradual progress of events occurring naturally and according to the ordinary laws of human affairs, drawn into relations to the living actors around me, of an altogether unexampled kind—at all events different from anything plainly recorded in the annals of past ages. I *believe* that the final result of such relations was the superinducing of a state of mental intercommunication through the medium of my sense of hearing.

"But this is a very old story, and merely a re-state-

ment of the perfectly well known features of my alleged monomania. Let me pass on and give as well as I am able my own theory on which I explain these phenomena, which may have more interest. It is a question of personal identification. How does a man use his own brain? He can use it because it recognizes the actions of his members as belonging to the personal unit of which it forms the summit. Now the question is, cannot a human brain under certain circumstances become so perverted as to recognize for itself, and without the volition of its bearer, the acts of other individuals as belonging to its life, as falling within its own memory? And if so, would not those individuals become partakers of the intellectuality of that brain, know its conceptions and ideas, while it thus recognized their motions, and become able to share its walks and ways? Such I believe to have been the result in myself, from the towering height of disintegration reached by my mental organism, by the gradual process which I have endeavored to faintly shadow forth in the preceding five chapters.

"Let us see whether it does not look probable that a mind in the habit of separating recognized observations from its own responsibility, considering them objectively, philosophizing on its own manner of working, driving the impotent and erratically-acting part into a corner, as it were, would not be more exposed to such a fate as supposed than one acting unitedly, and right or wrong as a unit. It may not be susceptible of argument based on points of organic action, but it looks a plausible thing to me that the insane quality or element in such a brain might be acted on from without, and give itself up to such action, independent of the thinking will of that mind.

"But let us further suppose some little abnormality about the original constitution, a predisposition from a slightly dislocated arrangement of mind-apparatus and sense-apparatus.

"Such, say I once more, I believe to have been the case with myself, and such to be the true nature and essence of the things which have constituted my insanity. . . . I do not deny the fact of insanity, but I firmly believe that it is and has been, since the summer of 1872, an insanity involving the will, ideas and acts of more than one individual.

“Notwithstanding my full and necessary faith in the reality of things as I have reasoned to prove them, I am still willing to concede that there has been more or less of purely subjective illusion mingled with these dual realities. Under one aspect the whole of this train of mental images and impressions which has whirled through my head has consisted of insane delusion. The effect on the state of my system has no doubt been analogous to that produced by delusions, and the nervous condition which preceded it was such as eventuates in the rise of delusions. Does not the development of delusions often have a compensating effect in freeing the nervous system in a manner from its trammels? Perhaps when this supervenes, the brain becomes a chimney for the combustion of the matters which threatened to entirely interrupt the action of the system by clogging. The patient is then known as sensible on most subjects, but a confirmed monomaniac.”

Certain peculiarities in his hallucinations possess considerable interest. They almost always referred to the intercommunication of brains. In July, 1878, he wrote out a list of specimen phrases which he had heard while sitting alone at an asylum window. Some of these I reproduce here :

“One thing you know, you know when you get your will in there you get him into a hell of misery.”—“He ain’t got any will there to fool away.”—“Although you are knowing his ideas you connect with her will.”—“Instead of connecting with his ideas you keep giving him to her.”—“You can’t get your will there till he connects his thought to his thought.”—“We are all the while trying to make him think himself.”—“I think we ought to be making efforts to get the idea out on the hall.”—“After they get the whole will he is in a hell of torture all the while.”—“We keep hollering till we get him into a hell of horrors.”—“You see, when there are two wills connected with the head at the same time, he ain’t nowhere.”

These were the voices of several men and women. In fact, his hallucinations were always polyphonic, and at times would be polyglot. They did not address him directly, but spoke to each other about him. He seldom had hallucinations of hearing, except when the ear actually received the sound of distant conversation or inarticulate noises; so that for their production it was usually necessary that there should be transmission of vibrations to the auditory cortical area. As instances of the polyglot character of the voices on occasion, I relate the following:

Once he heard some one call out, "If he ain't a prophet there never was a prophet—*tabulas dedi ut vincerer.*" In tracing this Latin to its source, he found it was a perversion of a phrase in a note to Whiston's Josephus: "*Egomet tabulas detuli ut vincerer*" (I myself carried the letter commanding that I be bound), attributed to Bellerophon, which he had once read.

At another time in a street car, a German sitting next to him cried out, "*Das ist das grösste Mirakel von der ganzen Welt. Jeder Gedanke der ihm in den Kopf gekommen ist hat die ganze Village gehört.*" (That is the greatest miracle in the world. The whole village has heard every thought that has come into his head.) The grammatical construction of the foreign phrases is open to criticism. The language used by his invisible tormentors was always a peculiar dialect, often abounding in slang, which he considered the most hateful kind of language, and which was such as he never voluntarily used in the composition of his own sentences. The hallucinations were usually boisterously satirical, teasing, quizzical, frequently accompanied with laughter.

It is seen that the author of "The Piling of Tophet"

was one of the most typical cases of a chronic primary insanity, as described by Morel, Sander, Krafft-Ebing, Mendel and others. Born with a constitution in which lurked a degenerative taint, he passed his youth as a hypochondriac, the victim of a morbid subjectivity, and on the eve of ripened manhood developed auditory illusions, which became slowly hallucinations, with the simultaneous evolution of delusions of persecution, followed later by systematized expansive delusions of a religious nature.

Shortly after writing his autobiography, he was removed to the county asylum at Mineola, where he remained without change in his mental condition until 1883, when his friends took him out to live with them. He spent eleven years in asylum life. He died a religious paranoiac in 1886. He did not become demented, but doubtless the indifference with which the world received the propagandism of the new prophet caused his philosophical withdrawal from active warfare in the fields of reform and theology.